"The Living Lincoln"

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Text—"He being dead yet speaketh." Hebrews XI: 4.

Scripture Lesson—Hebrews XI: 1-4 and 32-40.

"And so they buried Lincoln? Strange and vain!
Has any creature thought of Lincoln hid
In a vault, 'neath any coffin lid?
In all the years since that wild spring of pain?
'Tis false—he never in the grave hath lain.
You could not bury him although you slid
Upon his clay the Cheops pyramid,
Or heaped it with the Rocky Mountain chain.
They slew themselves; they but set Lincoln free.
In all the earth the great heart beats as strong,
Shall beat while pulses throb to chivalry
And burn with hate of tyranny and wrong.
Whoever will may find him anywhere
Save in the tomb. Not there; he is not there."

No! he is not the dead President of our Civil War but the living Lincoln of the present and future. Once in a great congregation Mr. Moody said: "Some day the news will come to you that Moody is dead. Don't believe it; for I have never been so much alive as I shall be when my spirit leaves this body." As soon as Mr. Lincoln breathed his last, Secretary Stanton exclaimed: "Now he belongs to the ages." The assassin's bullet instead of ending Lincoln's career, only released his essential personality that he might walk through the world and through the centuries a far mightier and spiritual force than he had ever been before. Like the Master whom he served and loved, it was expedient for Lincoln to go away from the limitations of the flesh that he might come again as a universal presence. He was permitted to move among men in bodily form only a little more than fifty-six years. But during this period

he revealed such excellence of character as entitled him to continued life on earth till time shall be no more.

Moreover his shall not simply be a continued life here, but a progressive one. His influence for good shall increase with each succeeding generation.

1st. If we seek to ascertain his claim to an earthly immortality, we must not overlook the physical basis. Plato tells us that the supreme requisite for success in life is "A sound mind in a sound body." Thus surely was Lincoln favored. He inherited a stalwart frame which, as it matured, towered up to a height of six feet and four inches. The hardships, exposure and toil of his earlier years, in pioneer conditions, hardened and toughened his muscular and nerve forces to such an extent that he was always equal to the strenuous demands made upon him in his later life. While yet a youth he exhibited marvelous strength. At the age of eighteen he constructed a little flat boat to take produce to market. Two commercial travellers hired him one day to take them and their big trunks out to a steamer. He sculled them out. They reached the boat. Then Lincoln lifted these huge sample trunks upon deck. It was a giant's task. He said he could scarcely believe his eyes as each of the men threw to him a fifty-cent piece, for he had not expected more than two bits. A year later he worked on a Mississippi River freight boat for ten dollars a month. No doubt there was no eight hour day in force then. When he was twenty-one he moved with his father and the family to Macon County, Illinois, where they erected a log cabin, and fenced in the new farm. When young Abe mauled the rails for this fence he little realized that he was writing a page in his life history which would be read by the whole nation. When the Republican State Convention met in Decator—which happened to be my birthplace—Lincoln rails were brought into the wigwam where the assembly gathered. These aroused immense enthusiasm. I well remember how we Decatur boys were eager to get hold of these noted rails that we might make out of them walking canes and various kinds of mementoes. As the genuine Lincoln rails became scarce, any old walnut rail was regarded good enough as a substitute. Through a long succession of experiences—all of which spelt work—hard and exacting, Lincoln developed fiber and sinew, muscle and nerve such as fitted him to bear heavy burdens and endure severe strains.

2nd. His intellectual greatness is not so easily accounted for, and yet we have a few pointers of value. There can be no question that his sturdy ethical soundness greatly aided him in the development of his mental powers. Altogether he had less than one year's schooling. But he was naturally studious and loved to learn. The peculiar quality of his intellect was much in his favor. He said: "I am slow to learn and slow to forget that which I have learned. My mind is like a piece of steel—very hard to scratch anything upon it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out." Early in life his mother encouraged him to express his thoughts in writing. May it not be that the Classic—his choice address at Gettysburg—is the highest expression of that encouragement? The books read by him in his boyhood were Weem's "Life of Washington," "Aesop's Fables," "Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress," and the Bible. Later he studied Shakespeare and other great authors. While still a boy in Indiana he borrowed a Life of Washington—improving the leisure afforded by a rainstorm to read it. As he was about to fall asleep he laid the book down as he thought in a perfectly safe place. In the morning it was soaked through, as the wind changed, beating the rain through a crack between the logs of the cabin. How terrible! But his courage arose superior to his dismay. He went directly to the owner, Mr. Crawford, showed him the injured book and offered to work for him until he was satisfied. After three days of hard toil in pulling fodder the rain-soaked book became his own valued property. However, above all other books, the Bible was the one which most profoundly impressed his soul and moulded his character. He committed whole chapters to memory. After 1857 he seldom made a speech which did not contain quotations from that sacred volume. He claimed that it was the most useful of all books to a public speaker. About a year before his assassination Mr. Lincoln wrote to a friend: "I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all this book upon reason that you can and the balance on faith and you will live and die a better man." He fed his mind upon the practical and eternal truths of this divine Book and grew into rare intellectual greatness.

3rd. Much as might be claimed for Lincoln's physical and mental attainments, yet the deeper secret of his living presence in the world today must be very largely attributed to his

moral and religious qualities. Of these notice: 1st. His radiant integrity. This sterling virtue was an essential element of his very soul. Indeed, it was largely his soul, for he was the soul of honor. Raymond, in his Life of Lincoln, says that even Washington did not surpass him in this particular. He revealed the secret depth of his integrity in this telling declaration: "Let us have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it."

2nd. Sympathy is another characteristic which with him always found practical expression. Even as a boy he was never cruel to birds or any animals. Kindness of heart was constitutional in his make-up. Late in life he could truthfully say that he had never wilfully planted a thorn in any man's bosom. "With malice toward none, with charity for all," as uttered in his Second Inaugural Address, expressed his constant attitude and sentiment of his inmost soul. It is said of Lincoln that no man clothed with such vast power ever wielded it more tenderly and more forbearingly. No man holding in his hands the Key of Life and Death ever pardoned so many offenders, and so easily. A very touching scene was observed in a hospital where a wounded Confederate lay, a prisoner. As Mr. Lincoln approached his cot, this rebel soldier, extending his hand exclaimed: "Mr. Lincoln, I have long wanted to see you to ask your forgiveness for ever raising my hand against the old flag." Mr. Lincoln was moved to tears. He heartily shook the hand of this repentant rebel and assured him of his good will. Once a woman with a babe in her arms waited three days to see the President in behalf of a pardon for her husband. When at length the baby set up a pitiful cry Lincoln heard it. He rang the bell. His servant appeared. He inquired about the babe. The mother was admitted at once with her little one. That scene was enough for his sympathetic heart. The husband and father was pardoned. As she went out, tears of joy flowing profusely, the attendant whispered to her: "It was the babe that did it." After all there is scarcely anything more needed among men than sympathetic kindness. Mr. Lincoln always had of it an abundant supply.

3rd. Again, Lincoln's religious convictions and practices formed a most potent factor in his vital and permanent personality. In this particular he has been seriously misunderstood. But his faith in God, especially in his maturer life, was unshaken and unwavering. It was my privilege to behold this great man the day he left his home in Springfield for Washington. From his lips, only a few hours previously, had come that memorable farewell address to the dear friends of his Illinois home. Referring to President Washington's reliance upon divine aid for his success, Mr. Lincoln declared: "I feel that I cannot succeed without the same divine aid and on the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support, and I hope you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive that Divine assistance, without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain." Few men have had greater confidence in the efficiency of prayer. At one time he wrote to Judge Gillespie: "I have read on my knees the story of Gethsemene. I am in the garden of Gethsemene now, and my cup of bitterness is full and overflowing." The awful burden of his responsibility in that terrible crisis he felt most keenly. His confidence in prayer seemed to increase as the war progressed. Immediately after the fierce battle of Antietem in 1862 he told his Cabinet: "I made a solemn vow to God that if General Lee was driven back from Pennsylvania, I would crown the result with the Emancipation Proclamation." God answered and Lincoln redeemed his pledge.

Concerning the decisive battle of Gettysburg, on the Sunday after its close, General Sickles, having lost a leg there, was in a hospital at Washington. Mr. Lincoln, with his son Tad, visited the General, who asked him how he felt while that battle was raging. "Were you not anxious?" Lincoln gravely replied that he was not. "Why?" Lincoln hesitated, but finally replied: "Well, I will tell you how it was. In the pinch of your campaign up there, when everybody seemed panic stricken and nobody could tell what was going to happen, I went into my room one day and locked the door and got down on my knees before Almighty God and prayed to Him mightily for victory at Gettysburg. I told God that if we were to win that battle He was to do it, for I had done all I could. I told Him this was His war, and our cause was His cause, but that we couldn't stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. And then and there I made a solemn vow to Almighty God that if He would stand by our boys at Gettysburg I would stand by Him. And He did, and I will. And after

that—I don't know how it was and I can't explain it, but soon, a sweet comfort crept into my soul that things would go all right at Gettysburg, and that is why I had no fears about you."

Just before the surrender of Vicksburg he said: "I have been praying over Vicksburg also and believe our Heavenly Father is going to give us victory there, too, because we need it." His pure, simple, child-like faith in God's willingness to hear and answer prayer was beautiful and a most potent power in his grand career.

Lastly, we notice a few special divine providences in the life of our Living Lincoln. His lowly birth and the pioneer environment of his earliest years had a providential bearing upon his destiny. The sweet-spirited Christian woman whom he so reverently spoke of as his Angel-mother and his sturdy Christian father—both seemed providentially qualified to mould his young life for unusual exigencies. He made several failures at business as a young man, which appear to have been a part of God's plan for him. Had he succeeded in making money the mystic vision and his prophetic penetration so valuable to him in deciding grave questions would no doubt have been dulled by material things. When Mr. Lincoln visited New York City some time before his nomination in 1860, he met a former acquaintance and said to him: "Well, Mr. B., how have you fared since you left Illinois?" He replied: "I have made a hundred thousand dollars and lost it all. How is it with you, Mr. Lincoln?" "O, very well. I have the cottage in Springfield and about $3,000 in money. If they make me Vice-President with Seward, as they say they will, I hope to be able to increase it to $20,000, and that is as much as any man ought to want." In Lincoln's failures and in his humble conception of a competency we see the leadings of Providence.

How Lincoln's soul was open to God's communications is illustrated by a vivid incident in his young manhood. He was only twenty-six years of age when he attended a camp meeting near Salem, Ill. That famous pulpit orator, Rev. Peter Akers, preached a powerful sermon on the "Dominion of Christ," in which he prophesied that slavery would be abolished. He predicted that it would come about in the Sixties. His words produced a profound impression. At last he cried: "Who can tell but that the man who shall lead us through the strife may be standing in this presence?" Within hearing was Abraham Lincoln. After returning to Springfield a friend asked him what he thought of the sermon. He said he regarded it the most wonderful sermon he had ever heard, and added: "Peter Akers has convinced me that American slavery will go down in the crash of Civil war." Then he said: "You may be surprised and think it strange, but when the preacher was describing the Civil war, I distinctly saw myself, as in second sight, bearing an important part in that strife." A vision and a prophecy was this. Surely Lincoln was a providential man. God raised him up for a high purpose, and his unswerving loyalty to God enabled him to accomplish that purpose. He is living today in all that is most honorable, most righteous and most glorious in our national character. Wherever there is a wrong cause that demands resistance, or a righteous cause that needs assistance, there is our Living Lincoln to cheer on the brave and the true. He is still marching at the head of the column, in the van of human progress, and will continue to hold that position "Until the Kingdom of this world shall have become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."

Why your great renown, Sire,
Ever greater as the years retire?
Is it that you were kind unto the mass
Of our dark complexioned men
Emancipated by your pen?

Your greatness, Sire,
Ever greater as the years retire
Comes through the likeness
Of your character and your face
With Him, the Redeemer of the race.

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